



# READING:

THE FOUNDATION CHILDREN  
NEED TO SUCCEED

FOR POLICYMAKERS



## The Policy Shift

Policymakers recognize improving students' reading achievement is a significant challenge. Raising reading scores in the aggregate is not enough now. All students must read proficiently. To improve every student's reading skills, policymakers must put in place carefully developed, comprehensive literacy policies that include, at a minimum, reading standards and a curriculum based on findings from scientific research. The policies should also build stronger connections between standards, curriculum, and the other factors that influence students' reading achievement.

Being able to recognize what characterizes rigorous research is essential to choosing the right reading curriculum. When policymakers are not familiar with research methodologies and findings, states may find themselves with literacy policies based on fads or incomplete findings. For example, a policy may require instruction in phonics but not phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, all of which are essential components of reading instruction. Using a curriculum based on partial findings will not result in better student achievement.



Policies that are thoroughly grounded in findings from scientifically based research will lay the groundwork for real reading improvement. Rigorous research findings can inform policy, shape effective reading instruction, and direct professional development activities. Federal education law also requires the use of scientifically based research to receive certain funds.

Redesigning literacy policy to ensure that all students develop stronger reading skills is complex, difficult work, but dependable information is readily available about how students can learn to read successfully.

## What Are the Essential Elements of Scientifically Based Reading Instruction?

Good reading instruction utilizes research-based instructional strategies and skills that include the five critical components of reading, as defined in the National Reading Panel's report: *Teaching Children to Read* (2000). These components, also named in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, are:

- **PHONEMIC AWARENESS**—the ability to hear, identify, and play with individual sounds— or phonemes—in spoken words
- **PHONICS**—an understanding that there is a relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language
- **FLUENCY**—the capacity to read text accurately and quickly
- **VOCABULARY**—the knowledge of words students must have to communicate effectively
- **COMPREHENSION**—the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read

The National Reading Panel's review found that systematic and explicit instruction is more effective than approaches that are less systematic, explicit, and focused.

## Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers can ensure that the most effective, scientific, research-based reading instruction is used in their schools by adopting policy that will:

- ▶ Require each school to implement a comprehensive reading program grounded in scientifically based reading research, with careful alignment of materials, tests, and texts that are geared to students' learning needs.
- ▶ Ensure that certification and licensure requirements reflect knowledge of, and ability to use, scientifically based reading instruction techniques in the classroom.
- ▶ Establish high-quality pre-service and in-service staff development that focuses on the application of scientific, research-based concepts of teaching reading.
- ▶ Provide for adequate and uninterrupted classroom time for reading instruction to enable every student to reach grade level performance standards.
- ▶ Establish a system to regularly evaluate student progress, using valid and reliable instructional assessments, throughout the school year.
- ▶ Use data from classroom assessments to determine where help is needed at student, classroom, school, and district levels.
- ▶ Require that, before determining that children require special education services for a learning disability, mechanisms are established to determine if the student received appropriate reading instruction in the regular classroom.

Nearly 40 percent of fourth grade students are unable to read at grade level, so the stakes are too high to take chances with unproven methods of reading instruction. Strong reading skills prepare children to meet the challenges of education and life and take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the Information Age. All children are entitled to the best preparation possible.

Scientifically based reading instruction moves us from rhetoric to results. It is indispensable if we are to produce and account for real achievement in our schools.

## The Partnership for Reading

This brochure was published by **The Partnership for Reading**, a collaborative effort of the **National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)**, the **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**, the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** and the **U.S. Department of Education** to make evidence-based reading research available to educators, parents, policymakers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to read well.

To find out more about The Partnership for Reading and scientifically based reading instruction log on to [www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading).



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